

THE

8

Franciscan Convert:

OR, A

Recantation SERMON

OF

ANTHONY EGAN,

Late Confessor General of the Kingdom of
IRELAND, and Guardian of the Priory of
Monasterioris, in the Province of *Leinster* ;
now a Minister of the Gospel, according to
the Ordination of the Church of England.

Preached at St. MAUDLIN's, in Old
Fish-street, *London*, April 6, 1673.



Printed in the YEAR 1763.



T H E

Franciscan Convert :

O R, A

Recantation-Sermon, &c.

Luke 22. the latter end of verse 32.

When thou art converted, strengthen thy Brethren.

Conversion is an hard work, but it is glorious; it relates to the two great faculties of our mind, the Understanding and the Will. Our Understanding, that our Faith be found; our Will, that our Morals be good. I will begin with our Morals, because it is no matter what our judgment is, when our manners are bad. Lewd men credit no Profession, but disgrace the Cause they own. Christianity consists of a redemption, and that redemption from the iniquity of our ways; that is to say, a turning from Sin to Virtue, from Satan unto God. A turning from a bad life is nothing else but a separation of a man's self from profane uses unto Holiness; as when a Child and Heir of Hell becomes one of the Sons of God, in Scripture phrase this work of Conversion is called a Ceasing from evil, and a learning to do well; a putting off of the old man, and a putting on of the new; and it is called a new Creature, a conformity to Christ in his Death and Resurrection; or according to the same Apostle elsewhere, *Be not conformed to this world, but rather transformed by the renewing of your minds.* Or lastly, in our Saviour's language, *A seeking the kingdom of God and the righteousness thereof, and being holy as he is holy in all manner of conversation.* Therefore, Christians, as you desire to have peace with God and your own minds, live soberly, righteously, and godly in this world. Labour to prove the truth of your profession by your pi-

ous practices. Endeavour to become living Images of God, Vessels of honour, and Temples of the Holy Ghost. I might argue against Sin from the common mischiefs of it, and remind Sinners of the labyrinths into which it leads them, and assure you that God's service is perfect freedom. For if all the happiness which Christian Religion propounds to us were only confined to such promises as have a relation to eternal Bliss, it might be thought that the Lord Jesus was only careful to make the end of a Christian race glorious, yet had neglected to make the way pleasant which leadeth thither. But if it be truly considered on the other hand, that those very Precepts which are enjoined as the Rules of our duty, are in themselves infinitely conducing to our own present satisfaction, then we must conclude that none can be miserable in the next world, but only such Sots as will not give God leave to make them happy in this. For the laws of the holy Jesus are so agreeing to our natures, that the execution of them are as great expedients of our present happiness as testifications of our duty, so that our duty and our priviledges run parallel in one line.

In the next place, as Conversion relates to our Wills, so also to our Understandings, that we may have such notions of God and his Worship as becomes the solemnity of that duty we owe to our God. And what dangerous errors Education and Prejudice may breed, is very obvious to all that have made remarks in the world. For we know that a dangerous principle hath hurried many into desperate practices. Saint Paul's zeal for the Mosaick law made him spurn against Christ himself. So that the immoralities and debaucheries of some men are less dangerous than their tenents. God forbid that any thing that I say should give the least countenance unto Vice; but to shew that we may fly from one extreme to another.

I may compare the enormities of Vice to a Sore that is ulcerated, nauseous, and offensive to all mens views: Errors in our Judgment (or a false worship of God) is like to a Sore skinned over, though not so offensive to our senses, yet more dangerous to the vitals. Our Saviour told the Scribes and Pharisees, that Harlots and Publicans entered into the kingdom of God before them; not
that

that we are to think that the kingdom of God is a place for either Harlots or Publicans, as such : but that the recovery of the one is more hopeful than the recovery of the other. The profane person is sick, but then he and all men know it : the Heretick is sick, but he thinks himself well, and so neglects all means for a remedy, and the cure of such a one becomes a wonder.

The subject I have chose this day is copious, and from it I might present you with many particulars, but I must forbear and come to the application, which I must center in myself :

When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.

I hope this Scripture is fulfilled this day on myself, being a Monument of God Almighty's mercy, in bringing me from the gross Superstitions of Popery to the glorious light of the Gospel ; and seeing the consequence of my Text is the strengthening of my brethren, I shall now give you some few of the principal motives which drew me from my former persuasions.

You must know I was bred and catechized in all the absurd doctrines and practices of the Romish church, and no little zealot in that way ; I was ordained Deacon and Priest, and made Confessor General throughout the kingdom of Ireland ; was a Friar of the Order of St. Francis, and afterwards Superior of a convent, and Chaplain to several eminent persons of quality in that kingdom. Upon a certain time I accidentally came to a publick house to refresh myself, I found that a lewd Priest had pawned the consecrated Host to the woman of the house for five and thirty shillings ; which I redeemed : and with this remark, That Christ was made by him, not an offering for Sin, but a sacrifice for his Lust. I need not tell you how great the scandal was to myself, but augmented by considering that the person was a Superior of an Order, and in great reputation among his people. There are many sad circumstances in the story, but I will forbear at present to mention them.

Upon this great disgust I began to dispute the Doctrine of Transubstantiation, and all the ridiculous consequences of it became evident to my understanding ; for suppose a Turk should tell me that I make my God, and then eat him ; and should he challenge me to produce so nonsensical

cal a Tenent in the Alcoran, I must either change my opinion of Transubstantiation, or quit my Christianity. Is it not strange that Christ should eat himself, and that all the Disciples should eat him alive before the Jews had crucified him? I know he calls the Bread his Body, but then he calls the Cup his Blood; and shall one be allowed to be a figure, and not the other? But that which expounds the whole Institution are these words: *Do this in remembrance of me*; that is to say, This Ordinance is a commemorative Sacrifice of myself; if Christ be corporally present, how comes there to be any exercise of our memories?—But others have said so much on this subject that I need say no more.

Another great motive of my Conversion, was their adoration of Images, so flatly contrary to the Second Commandment. God told his People Israel of old, that they saw no similitude, for the prevention of all manner of worship by Images. They say, by *Graven Image* is meant only an Idol; but then these words following, *Nor the likeness of any thing before me*, spoils that interpretation. For if by graven Images be meant only Idols, then the Commandment is altogether superfluous, for Idols were forbidden in the first Commandment, by having no other Gods; and if they say they worship not the Image, but the person represented by it: I answer, this justifies all the Heathens in their Idolatries; for they said they worshiped nothing made with hands, neither did they believe them to be their Gods, but that their Gods were present in them in an extraordinary manner.

In the next place, I will speak of the Doctrine of Purgatory, which upon serious examination became strange to me. Indeed I read of a narrow way that leads to bliss, and a broad way that is the high road to misery; but for that *Via media* that leads to Purgatory, I find it not in my Bible; yet I hold Purgatory, but it is in my Saviour's blood; and it is that Purgatory which only must purge my soul from sin; and if that Purgatory will do a sinner's work, I will look for no other. Yet for all this, Purgatory, in the Popish notions of it, is a gainful Doctrine; it is that fire which makes the Pope's pot boil; and therefore no wonder if they be so loth to have it extinguished.

Another motive that I had to abandon all communion with the Church of Rome, was that intolerable practice

tice of having the Service in a Tongue unknown to the people : and Chap. 14 of the former Epistle to the Corinthians seems to be wholly writ against that custom. It is said Exod. 12, 26. 27. *And it shall come to pass, when your Children shall say unto you, What mean you by this service ? that you shall answer and say, It is the Sacrifice of the Lord's Passover, &c.* When I read this Scripture it reminds me that God's Service is a reasonable Service, and that we ought to know the reason and meaning of that Service we perform to God. Edification and Devotion are inseparable from the true worship of God. Now should I, in the language of this Scripture, come to the common people at the celebration of the Mass, and say, What mean you by this Service ? What satisfactory answer can be expected ? Some of late (I must confess) have translated the Popish Prayers into the Vulgar Language, but the Pope has forbidden the use of them. So that who shall so use them are not right Catholics.

But above all the Tenents of Rome none seemed more ridiculous to me than that Doctrine of Infallibility, for if that be proved, I shall submit to any thing that she shall impose upon me.

For had St. Peter himself been appointed the infallible Judge of controversies, what needed the Council at Jerusalem, Acts 15 ? It would have been a much shorter cut to have had St. Peter's determination in the case, without giving the Apostles any further trouble in it. The Patriarch of Antioch pretends that he is St. Peter's successor, and we have more reason to believe him so than the Pope ; for antiquity is clear that he was a Bishop of Antioch, and the Scriptures are express that there he exercised his function, and that there it was that the Disciples were first called Christians. St. Paul saith, that to him was committed the care of all the Churches. St. Peter might have said those words with as much innocence as St. Paul, but it was God's mercy that he did not, for then the Pope would have pretended a good Text for his Universal Pastorship. But that which makes the Doctrine of Infallibility more vain are those contradictory establishments which are in that Church ; had I time I might give in endless instances. But that which is
the

the most mischievous to them is their non-agreement among themselves, where this Infallibility is seated; which makes nothing more fallible than the very Doctrine of Infallibility.

Among the many other Errors and ill Practices which I discovered in the Roman Church, their Cruelties were no small disgust to me, as if Christianity had taught them to forget humanity. I cannot but with horror think of those barbarous Massacres which were committed in my own country, as if Papists had guts, but no bowels; so that it is not only their Prayers, but Faith that they have written in bloody characters: You will hear them boast of Loyalty: Look into the Irish Histories, and then judge of those pretences. If by accident some have shewed themselves so in England, yet the constitution of their Church looks with another aspect: for I am sure I ever thought it a meritorious action to murder either Prince, or any Protestant subject, provided I was commissioned so to do by the Pope; but how to serve two masters, I understand not, the Pope and the King; I must tell you, that I myself am an instance of their intended cruelty. For after my conversion from their fooleries, and having by the good providence of God been instrumental in bringing seven Friars and Priests from their Communion, and several of their Laity, their malice was such, that preaching upon a Sunday in a Protestant church, a musket was levelled at me as I stood in the pulpit, but by God's mercy the bullet went only through my hair without doing me any other mischief; but when I saw my life was aimed at, I was forced to quit both my new preferment and my country. But are these things according to the Gospel of Peace? They that preach Religion with fire and faggot, surely know not what manner of spirits they are of. If our Saviour's kingdom were of this world his servants would fight; and indeed we read St. Peter used his sword once in his master's quarrel, but he got so sharp a rebuke for it, that I do not read that he ever so much as wore one after. Must the Pope cut off heads because St. Peter cut off an ear? This is strange. The old Romans thought to propagate the Faith by dying for it: Our new Romans think to establish theirs, but by a quite contrary method; Reason is the Crown of a man, Religion is the Crown of Reason, Christianity is the crown of Religion.

ligion, Charity is the Crown of Christianity, and Charity we know suffereth long, and is kind, and seeks its own establishment by means and methods the most like to itself.

I must also tell you, that the Prayers to Saints and Angels became very offensive to me, having in all the Scriptures not one precept, nor one Example to give countenance to any such custom. I am sure our Saviour invites weary and heavy laden sinners to come to him, Mat. 11, 28. And when I can come and have an access to the throne of his Grace with boldness, I shall not think myself to stand in need of any other spokesman; if I can be free with my Prince, why should I trouble any courtiers to present my addresses? Besides, we have great reason to believe there is an incommunicable gulf between the glorified Saints and us, for the Scripture tells us, *That Abraham knows us not, and Israel is ignorant of us, &c.*

I could also give large narratives of their pious frauds, as they call them, by which they delude the people to fix them in their gross Errors and Superstitions. When I was made a Friar, a great number of people were present at the solemnity; I appeared in a spruce garb, had there my horse, my sword and pistols, and appeared with much gayety and splendour. The head of the Convent advised the people to take notice of my pompous condition, and that I was willing to lay aside all those outward glories for St. Francis's sake, and accordingly I disrobed myself, and put on the mean garments which belonged to the Order, and then made three vows, of obedience, poverty, and chastity: After that took one and twenty oaths; now in the oaths I swore never to come on horseback, never to wear shoes, to obey my Superior in whatever he commanded me, without examining the lawfulness of his commands, not to be ashamed to beg, never to be out of my Friars habit. But that which was a cause of a disgust at that time unto me was this: The Superior tells me, that I must take my former garments, that is, return in the same posture I came, and go see my friends. And though all these things were against my oaths, yet he would absolve me from them. I must confess this seemed to me a strange cheat to the people, that he should tell them what self-denial I had practiced in taking those oaths,

oaths, and yet he presently absolves me from them. And this is the state of all the Irish Friars.

And I may tell you what offence I took in those vain stories which they have of Miracles, and especially when I discovered their grand impostures therein : For about seven years ago, a priest, near the city of Limerick, by name William Sarchwell, had for fifty shillings hired a woman to pretend herself a Cripple from her birth, and that she had a Revelation that if she dipped herself in such a Well whilst a Priest said Mass by the place, she should be recovered of her infirmity. The plot thus laid, and accordingly executed, she comes halting to the well, and returns out of it perfectly cured ; which became a Miracle to the people ; which did not only get the contriver of the cheat a vast sum of money, but also confirmed the people in their superstition. But after some time the Counterfeit had some remorse of conscience, came to me to confession in order to absolution, which I would not grant till she had declared the whole story to the congregation, which she did accordingly. It is well known the poor miserable people are mightily deluded by these cheats.

A Friar of great note and zeal told me, that he was at a Franciscan convent beyond the seas, where was the image of the Blessed Virgin, made with a scrue in the head thereof, where they put in some water, and having a string that came undiscerned to a place where the Friars stood (and when they thought the people had brought a good offering) then by the help of that string they could unloose the scrue, by which the Blessed Virgin seemed to weep ; and this was one of their Miracles. Indeed the relator (though a Friar) said it was a great scandal to him, and accordingly complained to the General of the Order, but his answer was, should he make a reformation in that particular, that convent would starve.

It is said, that the Monks of a certain convent attempted to put the like fallacy upon St. Bernard himself, by artfully preparing an instrument to carry a voice to the image of the Blessed Virgin, who when he came into the church saluted him with a *Salve Bernarde* ; but he, apprehensive of the cheat, gave no other return to the compliment than this : *It is a shame for a woman to speak in the church.*

But of all their fine stories commend me to this new Miracle

le they talk of for the confirmation of Transubstantiation. The story is this : They say, that in a certain place within the king of Spain's dominions, as the Sacrament of the Mass was celebrated all the perfect effigies and proportion of a man rose out of the Host ; but when the people came too near, that they might plainly see the Miracle, he vanished away. Therefore, for ever, hereafter it must be horrid blasphemy to deny Transubstantiation. I shall be hardly guilty of so much vanity as to make any replication to such a ridiculous story ; only let it be no offence to tell you what a remark a facetious person made to the relator of it : ' You suppose,' saith he, ' that it was Christ himself that appeared, and it seems that upon the approach of the people he vanished away, which is the only circumstance to make the story credible, for he might suppose the people were come to eat him, and so he vanished.'

Upon these considerations, and reasons, and others, more than I have now time to mention, I renounce here in the presence of God, and this great assembly, my former Popish ways, and withal I declare myself a Protestant ; and that you may believe me a true Protestant, I do further declare, that I am a Protestant according to the Church of England, as it is here by law established ; and I must further declare before the searcher of all hearts, that I speak none of these things either out of malice or prejudice, nor for any sinister end or corrupt design whatsoever, but that God's name may be glorified, his truth cleared, and my brethren edified, and that my own soul may be eternally saved.

But will it not be asked by some, Whether I be not gone from Popery to Popery, that is, unto the same church, tho' of another denomination ; it being objected, that the constitutions of this church are framed out of Popery, and the Common Prayer Book compiled out of the Mass Book ? I answer, The Devil hath many devices to carry on his own interest, and the Papists do contrive many engines to distract Protestants ; and I look upon this Objection to be hammered in their forge to make us worry one another, and to break our communion. But to give a full answer to the Objection, let me tell you, that I think I understand the Mass Book better than any here, and can assure you the argument is vain and unworthy : My reason follows. First, All is not Popery that is in the Mass Book.

There

There are several particulars of the Primitive Liturgy. *That* is not Popery: There are several places taken out of the holy Bible. Neither is *That* Popery. Secondly, there are several other good things in the Mass Book; and if it were not so, the cheat would be evident to every eye. You know the Devil could tempt our Saviour in Scripture language, shall we therefore expunge these Scriptures because the Devil used them? He transforms himself sometimes into an Angel of light, yet that makes him no less a Devil, though harder to be discovered. The Reformation quarrels not with the Church of Rome for any thing that is good, but what is really bad. We differ not from Rome in any thing but wherein she hath differed from herself. So the schism is in Rome, not here: and from very good grounds I am apt to believe that Rome hath altered almost as much in her religion as in her language; for you may as well say that the Italian is the antient language of Rome, as the present Court of Rome is the antient Church of Rome. The church is compared to a Spouse; the Pope hath put her in a Fool's coat, and besmeared her face with filth and nastiness. The Reformation washeth her face, and takes from her her ridiculous garments, but meddles not with her essentials, nor any thing else but what is an apparent scandal: But I know not how to represent the condition of our church at the time of the Reformation better than by comparing it to a house infected with the plague: The charity and wisdom of authority orders this house to be cleaned by burning all the infected rags, but the pewter, brass, or Iron, or other goods, not capable of infection, still abide to the use of the house. What remains of the comparison I leave to your own meditation to illustrate. I have only this to say, That as the Papists have attempted my life, I must conclude that they will traduce my name, and bespatter my reputation; but I hope your charity will relieve me. And for my own part, with the Almighty's assistance, I will be cautious that my life scandalize not my profession, that from thence the enemies of the Lord may have no cause to blaspheme: *but, &c.*

I hope you will join with me in giving to the God of my mercies all honour and praise, the just tribute of all created beings, henceforth and for evermore.

A M E N.

